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School

WHILE THE RE-EDUCATION OF THEIR ELDERS WAS BEING CARRIED OUT, it was the youth of the reservation on whom the Agents placed their ultimate hopes. The American faith in the transforming powers of education is nowhere clearer than in the words of Dyar:

> Being fully convinced that a radical change in the Indian character can only be wrought in childhood and early youth, I would most respectfully urge the co-operation of the Government in the prosecution of this work of taking the children from their native haunts of degradation, and clothing, feeding, and teaching them the habits and arts of civilization.[1]

It had been a slow start. Lindsay Applegate had employed a teacher, but as that functionary observed, he had been "instructed to labor on the farms and to give instructions to certain Indians in manual labor"—evidently not his metier.[2] The "sickly effort" as A. B. Meacham termed it, was abandoned,[3] and not until 1873 did Dyar's plan for a manual training boarding school bear fruit.[4] It met initial opposition. John Meacham had advocated the hiring of a "good reliable educated Indian" as teacher who "would himself be a living example of the result to be achieved by study. . . ."[5] Such a person might also have been able to reduce the initial aversion of parents to sending their children to school. Dyar noted, "I shall be obliged to commence with a very few—perhaps with orphans who have no friends to oppose." However, he wisely declined to use force.[6] In his efforts he was to have the steadfast support of Henry Blow, who became head chief in 1874. "Mr. Dyar . . . says," wrote Nickerson, "that he never could have established the school on this reservation, had it not been for him. He was its friend when all others were against it."[7]

Soon Dyar had over twenty scholars,[8] only to have to close

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the part of the Indians."[26] The issue was not successfully reopened until the administration of O. C. Applegate.

In the education for a new life which the schools essayed to impart—and this, against all diversions, was its chief task—the caliber of the teaching staff was crucial. It is difficult to evaluate the accomplishments of the teachers, for some were relatives or longtime friends of the Agent; and the adverse criticisms of such men as Emery sometimes cloak differences in educational outlook. Scattered through the records are remarks on the lack of prior school or Indian service experience. In one staff evaluation appears a notation on Thomas Davis, industrial teacher, "recommended by Governor Penoyer as his nephew. He is learning and is prepared to do better in the future."[27] Of another, J. W. Brandenberg, superintendent and principal teacher at the Yainax school, it was observed, "He has maintained good discipline in this School, though his methods of punishment may have been considered a little severely by the Department; he having resorted to the shackles in extreme cases. . . ."[28] These are commendatory remarks. Brandenberg was later removed by order of the Commissioner.

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An extreme instance was detailed by E. L. Applegate in charges against Col. H. B. Compson, the Superintendent of the Agency School. After describing the squalor of his residence, Applegate proceeds:

> As an example of the civilized White men, he could and did knock down his wife in the presence of the school girls while, at the same time, their daughter, the assistant matron, belabored him over the head with a wagon whip. The matron herself was an invalid, but of sufficient spite and vim; as to inflict scars on different parts of the bodies of school girls, and even upon their faces and heads.[29]

In the light of conflicts over educational and disciplinary practices and the frequent partisanship, it is not surprising that there should have been a high turnover of staff. The Superintendent of the Agency boarding school noted in 1892 that over the previous seven years there had been on the average a change in Superintendent every six months, and that there was marked insubordination among the scholars.[30] Eight years later, the

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*648 *657 • 875 876 Superintendent of the school at Yainax was more explicit. Acknowledging that it may occasionally have been necessary to resort to forbidden disciplinary measures, he added:

> When the Indians find that they cannot tantalize a careworn employee into doing something rash and thus secure his discharge, it will be easier to get along with a minimum of severity. . . . This is entirely impossible without occasional resort to force. Interest, where no object is visible, must sometimes be bolstered up by respect for physical force.

And he observed tersely, "I find some lack of training in employees and a good deal of smiling and obedient inertia."[31]

*648 *657 871 It had been the very purpose of the school to break with the past and thus shape the future. When the school prevented girls from participating in the puberty ritual and the boys from going on the vision quest, the break was sharp. When it exalted the virtues of hard work, it provided a reassuring continuity, albeit fortuitous, with the native exhortations. Many practices prohibited in the schools were merely suspended, to be resumed upon graduation.

To the old skills, however, new abilities were added. Nickerson had long ago suggested that apprentices such as young Jesse Kirk, "one of our oldest and most advanced school boys," be issued tools, after working out their value in the Agency shops, and thus be prepared at once to earn their living and to provide for their people services hitherto available only from the Agency.[32] Others had been trained to farm or ranch and to keep house; and all had learned in some measure to speak English, to read, to do simple arithmetic, and had at least an acquaintance with history and geography.

Beyond those competencies lay a precipitate of experience—for most children the first intimate experience—with the Agency. They had been subjected to a detailed and vigilant regimen which left few things private; and the chief lesson of the encounter for some was that there are ways to circumvent authority. To many, the governing white was symbolized for years in the face of a Miss "Hummingbird" or in the formidable visage of a Colonel Compson.